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## Shark tales, a sinking city and a breathless cop thriller: what to watch in August

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As the cool nights continue, it's the perfect time to cozy up with a new batch of captivating films and series.

This month's streaming highlights bring a little bit of everything, from gripping true crime, to thought-provoking political drama, and a nostalgic music documentary on the life and times of piano man Billy Joel.

So grab a blanket (and maybe a snack or two). Your next binge-watch awaits.

## **One Night in Idaho: The College Murders**

*Prime Video*

I remember seeing the gruesome 2022 murder of four college students in Moscow, Idaho, splashed all over the news in Australia. The world seemed momentarily gripped by the brutality of the killings, which happened in off-campus housing, while two other roommates slept downstairs.

The ensuing investigation was given significantly less attention, though. So when Prime Video dropped this four-episode limited series, well, that was my weekend sorted.

### **One Night in Idaho: The College Murders - Official Trailer | Prime ...**



The docuseries features exclusive interviews with the friends and families of the victims, so it doesn't feel gratuitous. It respectfully recounts the tragedy and explores its continued impact, while honouring the victims. It also builds the kind of tension and disquiet that is so beloved in the true crime genre, but not in a way that makes you feel gross watching it.

Notably, legal proceedings for the case were still underway when *One Night in Idaho* was released. And the series made it clear there was more to the story which couldn't be shared with, or by, the producers.

However, the trial has since concluded, with more information now available for anyone wanting to dive deeper into the case. This makes the series an absorbing watch.

– *Alexa Scarlata*

## **The Night of the Hunter**

*Various platforms*

In 1955, director Charles Laughton crafted [The Night of the Hunter](#): one of the darkest, strangest fairy tales ever to come out of Hollywood.

Shortly before Ben Harper is hanged for robbing a bank and killing two men, he hides the \$10,000 loot in the toy doll of his young daughter Pearl. Only Pearl and her brother John know the secret – until the deranged serial killer-priest Harry Powell hears about the money and sets out to recover it.

Harry marries Willa, Harper's widow, and then, after killing her, pursues John and Pearl relentlessly across West Virginia.

Robert Mitchum's depiction of pure evil is one of cinema's most vivid creations, with LOVE and HATE tattooed on the fingers of each hand.

The film did not align with the mainstream tastes of the era. Audiences and reviewers didn't know what to make of this abnormal mix of fairy tale logic, nightmarish imagery and biblical allegory.

Successive generations of critics and filmmakers have caught on to its brilliance. Critic Roger Ebert said it was "one of the greatest of all American films". In 2008, French film magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* voted it as the second-best film of all time, behind only Citizen Kane (1941).

The Night of the Hunter remains unsettlingly modern, 70 years on.

– Ben McCann

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**Read more: *After 70 years, twisted gothic thriller The Night of the Hunter remains as disturbing and beguiling as ever***

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## Families Like Ours

*SBS On Demand*

The highest point in Denmark, Mollehoj, is 171 metres above sea level, so it is plausible to imagine the whole country being overrun by water due to rising sea levels, leading to mass evacuation. This is the basic premise of the Danish series Families Like Ours.

The cleverness of this premise is that it turns comfortable middle-class Danes into refugees, facing hostility, poverty and violence as they seek to resettle. Given Denmark's hard line on refugees, this makes the series politically powerful, equally so for us in Australia.

The central figure is a young woman, Laura (Amaryllis August), who creates disaster for her family through what she believes is an act of huge empathy. The same is true of Henrik (Magnus Millang), who shoots an innocent man in what he believes is an act of self-defence.

Families Like Ours is not a comfortable series to watch, but it manages to raise central issues of our time, without ever seeming didactic or preachy. It succeeds in combining the personal and the political in a six-part show that is powerful – and leaves enough loose ends for a potential second season.

– *Dennis Altman*

## **The Man from Hong Kong**

*Various platforms*

A cinematic firecracker of a film exploded onto international screens 50 years ago, blending martial arts mayhem, Bond-esque set pieces, casual racism – and a distinctly Australian swagger.

From its audacious visual style; to its complex, life-threatening stunts; to its pioneering status as an international co-production, Brian Trenchard-Smith's [The Man from Hong Kong](#) has solidified its place as a cult classic.

A Sydney-based crime lord's activities come under the scrutiny of a determined Hong Kong detective, Inspector Fang Sing Leng. A fiery East-meets-West martial arts showdown explodes across the Australian landscape, pushing both sides to their limits.

The movie is a playful pastiche that confidently combines martial arts action, police procedurals, spy thrillers, and Westerns, all filtered through a distinctly Australian “crash-zoom” lens.

The film was an influence to Quentin Tarantino and paved the way for films such as Mad Max (1979), particularly in what Trenchard-Smith and his partner in film, stunt legend Grant Page, might call its “cunning stunts”.

The elaborate car chases and explosive stunt setups in The Man from Hong Kong served as prototypes for iconic sequences that would inspire the Mad Max films, among others, a testament to a bygone era of practical effects and thrill seeking audacity.

The Man from Hong Kong remains an exhilarating piece of pure cinema, despite its relatively small budget. It’s an exemplar (and occasional cautionary tale) for filmmakers in terms of international co-production, its cunning stunts, and genre blending.

– Gregory Ferris

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**Read more: *The Man from Hong Kong at 50: how the first ever Australian–Hong Kong co-production became a cult classic***

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**Dept Q**

*Netflix*

Based on the book series by Jussi Adler-Olsen, *Dept Q* is a gripping television adaptation for fans of Nordic noir and British crime drama.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, Detective Chief Inspector Carl Morck (Matthew Goode) has returned to work after a shooting which left him physically and psychologically wounded, his colleague partially paralysed, and another colleague dead.

With the dregs of a budget assigned to cold cases, and a team of misfit officers, Morck sets out to solve the four-year-old case of missing Crown prosecutor, Merritt Lingard (Chloe Pirrie).

We follow Merritt's story across various stages of her life. We see her as a teenager in the lead-up to a devastating crime that left her brother with a traumatic brain injury, as well as later in life, when she loses a major case involving a wealthy man on trial for his wife's death.

Shortly after the devastating verdict, Merritt went missing on a ferry ride to her childhood home, on the fictionalised island of Mhòr. Returning to the present, we see she has been held captive inside a hyperbaric chamber for the past four years.

The pressure under which Merritt is kept makes Morck's investigation high stakes from the start, while the movement between past and present highlights the impacts of past traumatic events on both characters.

*Dept Q* is a fast-paced, breathless thriller which will leave viewers craving its rumoured second season.

– *Jessica Gildersleeve*

## **Billy Joel: And So It Goes**

*HBO Max*

Produced by Tom Hanks, this two-part documentary about singer/songwriter Billy Joel covers more than five decades of music. Created very much from Joel's perspective, who is also the main narrator, the archival content is fascinating, and the music difficult to deny.

Discussion of Joel's early suicide attempts are a shocking and terrible reminder of how different things might have been. From here, the role of the women in his life – his wives, daughters, and mother ("his champion") – becomes vital. Beyond the headlines (particularly with his second wife Christie Brinkley), are partners who were muses, business supporters and emotional support pillars – some of whom gave Joel ultimatums when the time came to battle his alcohol addiction.

Brinkley, as well as Joel's first wife, Elizabeth Weber, are particularly moving interviewees. They would wait at home, or stand nervously backstage as Joel "went to work" to earn, repair and rebuild against the odds. No spoilers, but let's just say Joel ended up in trouble more than once.

On the other hand, the men in Joel's life are often distant: Jewish grandparents who escaped Nazi Germany; a father who left when Joel was small; a half-brother discovered later in life. These losses are never really healed.

Billy Joel: And So It Goes is a five-hour epic, a story of survival and ultimately, of peace. It is, of course, also a reminder of an incredible catalogue of music – joyful, ordinary and wonderful – and the extraordinary life behind it.



– Liz Giuffre

*If you or someone you know needs help, contact [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14*

## **Gardening Australia, season 36**

*ABC iView*

Since it first aired in 1990, Gardening Australia has offered tips and inspiration from every state and territory on a weekly basis. A perennial favourite, the show seems to possess perpetual appeal for world-weary viewers open to slowing down by growing plants.

The no-nonsense host Peter Cundall helmed the series until 2008 (Cundall died in 2021 at the age of 94). The honour of “King of Compost” now rests with the gregarious Costa Georgiadis, and a wider cast of presenters that has expanded to be more diverse and engaging. One stalwart from the start, Jane Edmanson, is still flourishing in season 36: her episode 4 segment titled “Fronds with Benefits” certainly caught my eye.

Topics covered this season range from small-space innovation and passion projects, to Indigenous knowledge and bush foods, through to permaculture and climate change. Episodes 6 and 20 – specials on native plants and NAIDOC Week, respectively – are both worth a watch.

While the series can distance renters, and might not be edgy enough for younger audiences, it has managed to stake out ground in the digital realm – with a blooming [online presence](#) for budding green thumbs.

One of the longest-running Australian shows still on air, it doesn't look as though Gardening Australia will be pulling up roots anytime soon.

– *Phoebe Hart*

## **The Buccaneers, season two**

*Apple TV*

Loosen your corsets, *The Buccaneers* is back for a second season of feminist sisterhood and fabulous gowns.

Adapted from Edith Wharton's unfinished final novel, the series follows a group of outspoken young American women navigating the marriage market in 1870s Victorian England. Gleeefully anachronistic with feisty girl power speeches and a contemporary pop music soundtrack, *The Buccaneers* is equal parts *Bridgerton* and *Gossip Girl* (complete with a character played by Leighton Meester).

Season two picks up where the first left off, with Jinny (Imogen Waterhouse) and Guy (Matthew Broome) fleeing the country to escape Jinny's violent husband Lord James Seadown (Barney Fishwick).

Meanwhile, sister Nan (Kristine Froseth) is busy back home leveraging her position as Duchess of Tintagel to help facilitate Jinny's return – a campaign that includes wearing a showstopping red gown to a black and white ball. In keeping with the series' M.O., this might be narrative nonsense, but it looks exquisite.

While trysts and love triangles continue to provide escapist entertainment, Jinny's abusive marriage dominates later episodes. If season one sought to expose the isolation and entrapment Jinny endured in her marriage, season two foregrounds her resistance in the face of it, intent on highlighting how perpetrators of violence manipulate legal and medical systems to tighten the noose around victims' necks.

Season two's veering between frothy excess and melodrama arguably results in some tonal patchiness. Nonetheless, it should be commended for its careful treatment of the corrosive impacts and dangers of coercive control. This – more than the downloadable soundtrack and dazzling costumes – makes it good viewing.

– *Rachel Williamson*

## **Dangerous Animals**

*Prime Video*

Dangerous Animals is perhaps the most original and entertaining shark horror film we have seen since Jaws – incorporating traditional elements of the shark thriller genre, while challenging them at the same time.

The film starts with the primal fear of being eaten alive by monstrous sharks, with gruesome shock-thrill scenes of tourists being torn apart in a blood red ocean.

But later, the narrative reminds us it is the boat captain, not the great white, who is the real sadistic killer. Predictably, we see a young bikini-clad woman who gets horribly dismembered (just like the first unforgettable victim in Jaws).

However, it is also a fearless bikini-clad woman, Zephyr (Hassie Harrison) who turns the tables on the boat captain, outwits him, rescues her boyfriend and even makes friends with the shark.

Dangerous Animals includes some interesting subtext and commentary, such as when it compares women to fish – creatures hunted for sport – and when it highlights the inherent cruelty of fishing, and the hook that impales the prey.

The film delivers sophisticated special effects and gruesome eco-horror entertainment. It is a fun, self-aware and postmodern watch that will leave you thinking.

The Australian influence is delightfully evident in the irreverent humour. And for anyone who has been to the Gold Coast, there is much pleasure in seeing the film play out across its iconic locations.

This film will trigger your childhood fear of Jaws – but with a twist.

– *Susan Hopkins*

## **Shark Whisperer**

*Netflix*

In Shark Whisperer, the great white shark gets an image makeover – from Jaws villain to misunderstood friend and admirer.

However the star of the documentary is not so much the shark, but the model and marine conservationist Ocean Ramsey (yes, that's her real name).

The film centres on Ramsey's self-growth journey, with the shark co-starring as a quasi-spiritual medium for finding meaning and purpose (not to mention celebrity status).

Whisperer and the [Ocean Ramsey website](#) tap into the collective fascination with dangerous sharks fuelled by popular culture. Many online images show Ramsey in a bikini or touching sharks – she’s small, and vulnerable in the face of great whites. As with forms of [celebrity humanitarianism](#), what I have dubbed “sexy conservationism” leaves itself open to criticism about its methods – even if its intentions are good.

Globally [at least 80 million sharks](#) are killed every year. Thanks in part to the hashtag activism of Ocean Ramsey and her millions of fans and followers, Hawaii was [the first state](#) in the United States to outlaw shark fishing.

So, Ramsey may be right to argue her ends justify the means.

– Susan Hopkins

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**[Read more: Netflix's Shark Whisperer wants us to think 'sexy conservation' is the way to save sharks – does it have a point?](#)**

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